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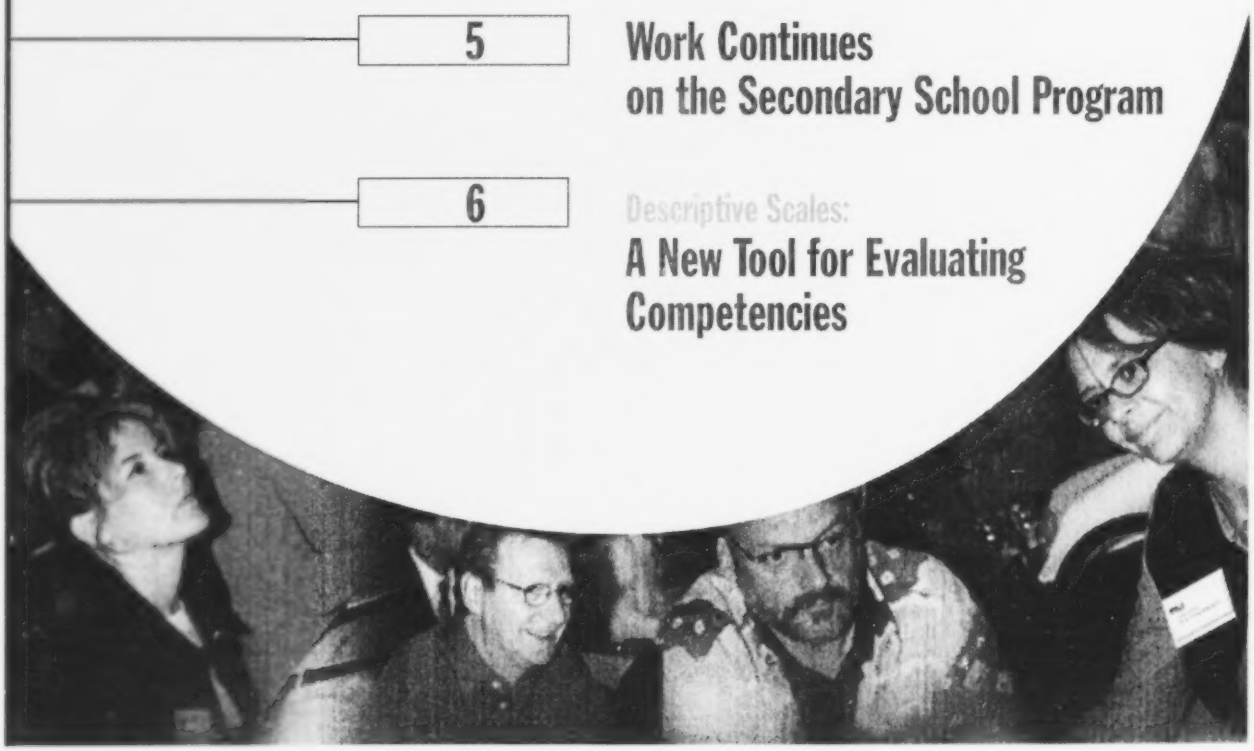

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Strengthening the Foundations

By Eve Krakow

While the 2000-2001 school year was marked by a certain amount of turbulence that dominated the public arena, a completely different scenario was taking place in the classrooms—one of hard work and patience. "There were difficulties, but the focus was kept on the basic principles of the reform, with everyone working at their own pace," said Robert Bisaillon, assistant deputy minister for preschool, elementary and secondary education, in his opening address at the May 29-30 training session for resource persons.

In a survey carried out among Cycle One and Cycle Two teachers, he said, there was wide agreement with the underlying principles of the reform. "Teachers think this program is better suited to today's realities. Most believe they will be able to contribute something of themselves, and that the program reinforces current teaching practices."

At the same time, there is still much dissatisfaction and concern over the issues of training, meeting time, support and guidance. School board directors general will be meeting in June to look at how to respond to the survey's findings in their school boards. As well, the Table de suivi de l'implantation de la réforme will be meeting today.

The Table has already made a number of decisions to facilitate implementation of the reform, said Bisaillon. However, the effects have yet to be felt since many of the changes will occur only next year.

For example, the student-teacher ratio will be lowered to 18-20 students in Cycle One classrooms in disadvantaged schools as of September. What's more, 400 schools have been added to the list of disadvantaged schools, which means the new ratio will affect one out of three schools in Québec. "Perhaps this will enable people to see how differentiated teaching can be achieved," said Bisaillon, adding that he hopes schools will respect this classroom limit, given the importance of the early years of schooling.

As well, an additional $14 million will be injected over the next four years to give teachers release time for working in cycle teams. "And if other efforts need to be made, we will make them," Bisaillon stated.

"So the fog surrounding the conditions for implementation has somewhat dissipated, but I maintain that we will never have all the conditions. We will therefore continue to follow things very closely." This is one of the reasons for the recent creation of the support committee for implementation of the reform. "This is a strategic committee: we decided we needed our own tools so as not to be at the mercy of surveys and studies carried out by others."

Regional Action Plans

One strategic orientation to be carried out next year, he said, will be to have training plans, action plans and communication plans for each region—"so that we can finally tell the public about everything that is going on in the schools but that is hardly publicized, considered or acknowledged."

On the issue of the revision of the Québec Education Program, Bisaillon stated, "We still intend to have a final version of the QEP for the elementary level ready and available in all schools around August 15." He noted that this should not prevent resource persons from carrying out training activities, as the main goal of the revisions is merely to simplify and clarify the program.

Bisaillon then broached one of the crucial topics of this two-day training session: the evaluation of student learning. "I have said in the past that the evaluation of learning is the rock that could cause the boat of the reform to sink." He invited participants to reflect on ways of planning and supporting evaluation in relation to promoting students to the next cycle. Although the (draft) policy on the evaluation of learning aims to avoid holding students back, it does not advocate automatically promoting student to the next cycle either, he emphasized. The idea is to give students appropriate support—in some cases, intensive support—so that their learning progresses. "We're not evaluating students with the goal of giving them an elementary school diploma, but to help them learn."

Bisaillon also talked about the importance of teachers' professional judgment in the evaluation process. "This scares everyone, even though everyone is for it." Teachers are not used to this role, and tend to think, the more tests they give, the more their judgment is justified. Parents are worried that such judgment will be too subjective. "Yet look at any other

professional activity—medicine, for example. A doctor's professional judgment is not the sum of the tests carried out. The doctor makes a diagnosis based on the available information, and we accept that diagnosis." The same is true for education: teachers' judgment is a purely professional act, based on the information gathered during tasks carried out by the student in various learning and evaluation contexts over a period of time. However, he said, teachers still need to be trained, and parents need to be reassured.

Finally, report cards remain a hot topic. "The important thing is to have descriptive report cards, as this is what best corresponds to the spirit of the reform." It is also essential that they be easy to understand. Bisaillon added that it would not be desirable for each school to have a different report card; perhaps the school boards could produce a model which could then be adapted locally, or schools could work together to come up with a common model.

Role of Resource Persons

Bisaillon once again stressed the important role resource people have in providing information, training and support to teachers in their schools. "This need came through so strongly in the survey that it would seem that even the impression that there is no support is enough to cause discouragement."

With the expertise they are developing, he said, resource persons are in the best position to attest to the progress of the schools and school boards as communities of learners. Bisaillon concluded with the hope that the work being done in schools will eventually be seen by more people, "so that the public realizes that this reform is not one person's idea, but that it is being carried forward by educators themselves."

The Québec Education Program:

Where We Are Now:

Making the Québec Education Program Clearer and More Concise

By Claudine St-Germain, Wendy Mill and Pascale Sauvé

The key words for the 2001 version of the QEP are clarity, conciseness, precision and rigour.

Since the implementation of the Québec Education Program in Elementary Cycle One, educators throughout Québec have been reflecting on how to improve it, how to make it clearer and easier to use while building on the work that has already been accomplished. Margaret Rioux-Dolan, Huguette Drouin, respectively director and assistant director of the Direction de la formation generale des jeunes, Nicole Gagnon, coordinator of the Program of Programs, and Lise Ouellet, coordinator of the French language of instruction program, explained why changes are being made to the Québec Education Program for the elementary and secondary levels and what the changes are intended to achieve.

The main objective is to organize and present the QEP in a way that favours the integration of cross-curricular learnings with subject-specific learnings and knowledge.

To attain this objective, measures are being taken to:
- make it easier to locate information in the QEP
- clearly indicate the links between the Program of Programs and the programs of study
- present the cross-curricular competencies as the backdrop for the subject-specific competencies
- make greater use of the areas of lifelong learning as contexts for questioning, applying and transferring learning (and not just as themes on which to base activities)
- emphasize the essential learnings—the new name by which the subject content will be called—the importance of knowledge, high standards, the cultural dimension and the quality of the language of instruction. It was not clear enough in the first version of the QEP that knowledge had a major role to play.

There are two main reasons for these changes. First, the Ministère wanted to make the Québec Education Program clearer, in response to a need expressed by the Commission des programmes d'études, teachers in the pilot schools, the program development teams and society in general. The idea was also to make the Québec Education Program more user-friendly in order to encourage teachers to employ it regularly as a guide in their planning, teaching and evaluation. "We want teachers to integrate the QEP into their pedagogical practices," stated Rioux-Dolan.

Easier to Use

It is important to understand that these modifications are adjustments; they do not change the basic orientations of the QEP. Rather, they are designed to improve its organization and presentation, to meet the Ministère's goal of greater clarity.

As regards the content of the QEP, the Ministère proposes to:
- reduce the number of competencies and formulate them more simply
- retain only prescriptive elements (to avoid the risk of confusion with optional elements). This means that the Characteristics section of each competency, as well as the suggestions for students' individual work will be eliminated.
- organize subject content in terms of integrating concepts (strategies, knowledge, techniques, etc.)
- indicate more clearly the level of competency expected at the end of each cycle
- include in the section "Description of the Competency" (formerly "Expectations Related to the Competency") information on the student profile expected at the end of each cycle
- replace the specific learnings in Cycle One in the Social Sciences and in Science and Technology (defining a prerequisite competency in each subject area, placing each prerequisite competency in its respective subject area, and taking the prerequisite competencies into account in the programs of study)
- revise and explain the diagrams

In order to make the QEP more agreeable and easier to use, the MEQ will also:
- simplify the language used
- eliminate repetitions, overlaps and wordiness

Continued p. 4

- indicate references to, and links with, the Program of Programs
- propose a solution to replace the columns of Xs referring to the cycles (which tended to be confusing)
- use various means, such as different colours for each section, to help readers navigate between sections
- have the layout redone by graphic designers
- reduce the number of pages
- use landscape layout
- continue to use 8 1/2" X 11" looseleaf sheets in a ring binder
- do a final reading to ensure that all parts of the document are consistent

The 2001 version of the Québec Education Program should be available throughout the school system in August. In the meantime, educators can continue to use the present version without any problem, because the changes will have little effect on the content of the program and none whatsoever on its basic premises.

Changes to the Program of Programs

Nicole Gagnon, the coordinator of the Program of Programs, explained certain changes that are being made in the organization of this part of the Québec Education Program. It is hoped that these changes will make it easier for teachers and cycle teams to use the Program of Programs.

The presentation of each cross-curricular competency will be modified. Following the Statement of the Competency, each competency will be organized in terms of four categories:

- Description of the Competency (see above) will offer explanations and suggest explicit links between the competency, the areas of lifelong learning and the subjects.
- Key Features of the Competency, a category that existed in the previous version. These are short sentences that describe a step or procedure.
- Development of the Competency, a new category
- Benchmarks; this new category will replace Evaluation Criteria and in some cases, modify its content. The idea underlying the change is that with cross-curricular competencies, there cannot be any precise expectations and the emphasis should be on progress rather than evaluation, but at the same time, educators have to know what to look for in order to decide how to intervene to help a child progress.

Some Examples

To illustrate the new format, Gagnon presented a detailed description of the structure of an intellectual competency, *To use information*, and a personal and social competency, *To work with others*.

To use information:
The Description of the Competency (ex-Expectations Related to the Competency) will be pared down. It will now read: The students use various information sources and gather data according to their needs and interests. The other expectations—They adjust their knowledge on the basis of the new information, and use the knowledge in various contexts—will be eliminated.

Of the Key Features of the Competency, one will be revised slightly, but all four key features will be included:

- The student gathers relevant information
- The student organizes information
- The student uses information
- The student evaluates his/her procedure

The new category, Development of the Competency, will apply to all the cross-curricular competencies. It will read:

- At the preschool level
- From Elementary Cycle One through Elementary Cycle Three

To work with others:
The Description of the Competency will be simplified. Previously, the Expectations Related to the Competency were:

- The students make a personal contribution to team efforts.
- Their attitudes encourage interaction and feedback.
- They make a point of helping the group achieve its objectives.
- Teamwork involves learning how to work together and learning by working together.

In the new version, this category will read simply: The students contribute to team efforts.

The Development of the Competency (see above)

There will be four Benchmarks, all of which were previously Evaluation Criteria:
- Participation in planning a task
- Participation in performing a task
- Observance of work procedures
- Suggestions for possible improvements

One former evaluation criterion, Identification of conditions that facilitate or hinder cooperation, will be eliminated.

The table below compares the Benchmarks with the Evaluation Criteria in the previous version of the QEP, for this competency.

Benchmarks	Evaluation Criteria
• Consultation of various sources	• Appropriate selection of information
• Appropriate selection of i...ormation	• Consultation of various sources
• Coherent organization of information	• Logical organization of information
• Identification of strengths and weaknesses in use of information	• Identification of strengths and weaknesses in use of information
• Use in new contexts	

By Claudine St-Germain

Other Changes

In addition to these changes in the presentation and structure of each cross-curricular competency, Gagnon noted, certain competencies themselves are being revised. The personal and social competency *To demonstrate a sense of ethics* will be combined with the intellectual competency *To exercise critical judgment*, creating a new competency, *To exercise critical, ethical and aesthetic judgment*. Among the personal and social competencies, there is some question as to whether *To work with others* overlaps too much with *To maintain harmonious interpersonal relations*. However, no decision to change either competency has been reached so far. Meanwhile, in order to accentuate the cultural dimension in personal development, the competency *To develop his/her personal identity* is being changed to: *To develop his/her personal and cultural identity*. It is possible that other minor changes will be made to the names of certain cross-curricular competencies.

Finally, one Area of Lifelong Learning, Social Relationships, is being eliminated from the QEP, as it overlapped too much with the personal and social cross-curricular competencies.

The Programs of Study Accent on the Essentials

While the spirit and content of the programs of study remain unchanged, they will nevertheless undergo some adjustment. Huguette Drouin outlined the principal modifications made to the organizational framework common to all programs.

The programs of study will have a new structure. Each one will begin with an introduction that describes the program's characteristics, states how the cultural dimension will be integrated into the program and lists the program competencies. Then, there will be a statement of each competency, followed by a description of the program of study and the cross-curricular competencies; the teaching, learning and evaluation context; and the progress of the student, the elements of the competency—in the form of a bulleted list—the evaluation criteria and the end-of-cycle expectations.

Another important adjustment is that the characteristics of the competency will be reworked and incorporated into the Québec Education Program in another form. "Some people regret this decision. This feature was widely appreciated," admitted Drouin. "It was good, but it was optional and very analytical. The old formulation gave the impression that all the characteristics had to be present before a student could be said to have developed the competency." Drouin added that a certain number of these characteristics will be incorporated into the texts on the competencies and, if necessary, the rest may be transferred to the supporting document that will accompany the Program.

In addition, the essential learnings—formerly called the subject content—will be grouped around integrating concepts: knowledge, strategies, techniques and others, as needed. "We have tried to bring the learnings closer together so that people do not have to read too many pages before realizing that there are, in fact, learnings somewhere," Drouin pointed out. For some subjects, the essential learnings and knowledge will be placed immediately after the competency. For others, they will be put at the end.

As part of the cultural dimension, cultural references will be suggested. These are examples to which teachers can refer to bring alive the cultural dimension of each subject.

The sections on information and communication technologies (ICT) will be kept. "We consider that learning about and using ICT is prescriptive. The suggestions for student projects and enrichment activities will no longer appear in the Québec Education Program."

Organizational Framework

Introduction
Competency no.
Description of the competency
Explanation
Links with the cross-curricular competencies
Teaching, learning and evaluation context
Development of the competency
Elements of the competency
Evaluation criteria
End-of-cycle expectations

Essential learnings
Cultural references
Information and Communications Technologies (ICT)

Work is continuing on the development of the secondary school program, which is to be implemented as of 2003. The program development committees, whose mandate is to prepare the ground for the larger committees by doing research, reading and other work, have been on the job since February.

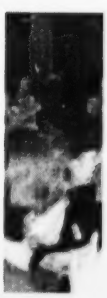
A test model of the program will be published in fall 2001, and a call will go out to the schools in order to identify those interested in taking part in the testing as pilot schools (in 2002-2003). As was the case for the elementary education program, the participating schools will be selected to represent the reality of secondary education in Québec as closely as possible.

A draft version of the Secondary Cycle One program should be available in June 2002. Measures for implementing the three-year cycle will be drafted by winter 2002; committees are currently studying this question.

As was the case for the elementary education program, work is being carried out simultaneously on the Program of Programs, the programs of study, the evaluation of learning, the certification of studies and the regulations. It is already clear that the structure of the Cycle One program will be different from that of Cycle Two, because Secondary III, the end of Cycle One, marks the end of common-core basic education.

An orientation document on the learning expectations for each cycle will be produced and distributed in the school system in fall 2001. This document will help guide the work of the program development committees as well as assisting educators in integrating the program.

Descriptive Scales: A New Tool for Evaluating Competencies



By Claudine St-Germain

In the next few months, school staff will begin using a new evaluation tool: descriptive scales. To help them become familiar with this mode of evaluation, Pierrette Jalbert, of Société GRICS, and Michel Laurier, a Université de Montréal professor, explained their principles and use.

"The aim of a descriptive scale is to describe the course of development of a competency through all the cycles of elementary and secondary school for subject-specific competencies in terms of expectations, and for cross-curricular competencies," explained Jalbert.

Teachers can use the scales to see where their students are in the evolution of their learning and share the responsibility to help them progress. Descriptive scales also enable parents and students to become aware of the levels in the development of a competency and the end-of-cycle expectations for the subject-specific competencies.

"These scales are being developed in line with the Québec Education Program, using the end-of-cycle expectations as the main link," said Laurier. "They are not another program, they are a complement to the QEP."

Clear and Concise

Jalbert gave a brief picture of the descriptive scales that will be used at the elementary level. "For each cycle, a scale consists of three or four levels of competency (or stages)," she explained. "Each level of competency is accompanied by a general description of what a student can do at that level. This description includes only those elements of the program of study considered significant at this level of development; it is not a list of everything in the program!" To help educators understand how the scales are used, the description of the levels of competency may be accompanied by examples or samples of student work.

An effective descriptive scale illustrates the degree to which a characteristic is present, makes it possible to record the judgment made, is based on a continuum (rather than on a number of unrelated elements), and comprises a number of stages, depending on the targeted results and the level of discrimination possible. "There is no point in having 12 stages if teachers cannot distinguish between them in a classroom situation," said Jalbert. Stages in a descriptive scale should not be associated with specific times in the academic year, she warned, as the development of competencies varies greatly from one child to another and from one milieu to another.

End-of-cycle expectations are established for each subject-specific competency, but not for the cross-curricular competencies. "Cross-curricular competencies are high-level competencies that focus on the integration of learning. They are developed to different degrees according to students' individual characteristics, what they learn outside of school and the environment in which they live. What's more, we continue developing cross-curricular competencies throughout our lives. For these reasons, we decided not to specify end-of-cycle expectations."

Teachers can refer to a descriptive scale throughout a cycle, to see where students are in the evolution of their learning. They can then adjust their teaching practices and provide students with the appropriate support.

At the end of a cycle, teachers can refer to the descriptive scales for the students' end-of-cycle progress report. This will enable them to judge, for each competency, whether:

- The student has exceeded the level
- The student has attained the level
- The student has attained the level but certain aspects are not consolidated
- The student has not attained the level

The end-of-cycle progress report is transmitted from one cycle to the next, so that each cycle-team is aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each student. It may also be used to produce the final report card that is sent to parents.

Working Closely with the Educational Community

The descriptive scales are being written in close cooperation with people working directly in the school, particularly teachers and program developers. The criteria for writing a descriptive scale include conformity with the program, clarity of the descriptions, conciseness and the inclusion only of essential elements.

The elements selected must be easy for teachers to identify, because the scales have to be user-friendly. It is also important that teachers be able to discriminate easily between the levels of competency. "The distinction between the stages should be clear. Otherwise, a student may be placed at any level, and the scale becomes useless," explained Jalbert.

Why Descriptive Scales?

Several factors underlie the use of descriptive scales in the evaluation process in elementary school. Foremost is the desire to communicate the progress of student learning effectively. The idea is not to add up the scales, but to obtain a profile of each student based on his or her competencies.

Performance standards have been developed in most countries in response to demands for accountability. In connection with these standards, benchmarks have been established to monitor the development of a competency without necessarily requiring that all students reach a given benchmark at the same time. "The use of descriptive scales can go beyond these concerns and become a tool for student learning," said Laurier. This evaluation method fits in well with the Québec Education Program, because the competencies develop over time and to different degrees. "The benchmarks explain the conditions in which the competencies will develop," said Laurier.

Finally, descriptive scales are part of an approach to evaluation that seeks to give a more comprehensive image of the student's development and to illustrate how learning develops.

According to Jalbert, the descriptive scales should be available for use in schools by the beginning of the school year.

Thank you!

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